

Jenny de Fine Licht (University of Gothenburg, School of Public Administration) [jenny.definelicht@spa.gu.se] and Peter Esaiasson (University of Gothenburg, Department of Political Science). *Walking a Mile in Their Shoes: Local Politicians' Perceptions of Hard Decisions*.

Abstract: In light of increased pressure on local governments' capacity to handle contemporary challenges such as financial constraints, climate change, and an aging population, this paper draws attention to those actually making controversial policy decisions. Based on the responses to free-text questions of more than 800 local and regional politicians in Sweden, we map and analyze how they perceive and manage the process of making policy decisions that might upset substantial parts of the population. Two deceptively simple questions are in focus: In the eyes of those actually responsible for making them, what is a hard decision? and how should hard decisions be handled? The paper thereby provides a nuanced and practice-based understanding of the everyday reality and considerations of local politicians that can inform contemporary debates on democratic representation and the role of the public in political decision-making.